



# Promoting Early Identification of Developmental Delays

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

In the United States, an estimated 17 percent of children have a developmental or behavioral disability such as autism, mental retardation, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Although children with developmental delays will benefit from early identification and intervention, many children with such problems are not being identified and treated appropriately.

Depending on the severity and number of conditions present, research has shown that developmental disorders increase a child's risk for poor school performance, reduced school attendance, poor peer relationships, substance abuse, delinquency and violence later in life, poor overall health status, injuries, hospitalizations and longer hospital stays, and higher direct medical expenses and indirect costs (e.g., lost work days for parents/guardians).

The health care system is one place where children are consistently seen and is therefore an ideal place for tracking child development through screening. However, factors including time constraints, inadequate use of assessment tools, and concerns about reimbursement have prevented screening from becoming a routine part of standard child health care.

Developmental screening—a brief assessment designed to identify children who should receive more intensive diagnosis or assessment—can improve child health and well-being, especially for children with developmental disabilities. Early detection and evidence-based early intervention can have a significant positive impact on a child's psychosocial, physical and cognitive health, and reduce the need for more costly interventions. For example, children with autism who are identified early and receive early intervention show significant improvement in cognitive, social, and motor skills; language; and educational achievement.

## WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

- A public health campaign has been developed to increase awareness among parents/guardians and health care professionals about the benefits of early intervention and the need for systematic developmental screening and assessment.
- A protocol has been developed for pilot screening and early intervention programs for developmental disabilities.
- A CDC Developmental Screening web site is available to the public and health care providers:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/child/>
- In 2002, CDC sponsored a meeting of experts in the field of developmental screening to discuss how to improve the practice of developmental screening in pediatric primary care settings.

## WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

- Finalize the developmental screening initiative plan and public health research agenda, with substantial input from key stakeholders.
- Develop the capacity to monitor the integration of developmental screening into primary care and other relevant systems nationwide.
- Implement pilot projects for developmental screening to determine best practices for integrating routine screening into pediatric primary care settings.

For information on this and other CDC and ATSDR programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/programs](http://www.cdc.gov/programs).

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